



PSALM 96 – Tuned for Mission. Adam Friend 24th September 2023

Good morning! I wanted to begin by sharing a moment from just over ten weeks ago, the day our daughter Anna was born, in fact it was about an hour after her birth. There is my beautiful new baby girl, quiet and calm, head laid down against and eyes looking up at my astonishingly resilient and strong wife. And we hold up the phone and facetime our little boy Caleb whose staying with Avril's parents. I see his big smile as the call connects and he says with that big smile, "Hello! Hello baby. Hello baby Anna. You're my little sister."

Whether they are big things or small things, there are things that just make your heart sing, aren't there? When you watch the Matilda's make the World Cup semis, the moment you hear a loved one pull into your driveway, when your barista calls your coffee order is ready. There are things, big and small, that make your heart sing.

Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise.

I wonder, where does that statement sit in your heart?

Where does the thought of seeing old and new voices praising God sit in your heart?

In Psalm 96, the Psalmist assembles this imaginary choir of enormous proportions – all people; every man woman and child. So great is the song he seeks to conduct that he captures all of creation in its performance. Every brook, a soprano, every mountain a tenor. The Psalmist provides a picture of the universal praise of God.

Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise. As the Psalmist casts this enormous musical vision, what he is wanting to do is bring our hearts with him.

That is, he wants us to capture his passion, tune our hearts to his longings, to desire with him for the universal praise of God.

You'll likely know that the Psalms are a wonderful part of Scripture, given to us in order to teach us not just how to think, as followers of the Lord Jesus, but also how to feel.

The Psalms, with their poetry, engage our hearts, and pluck our desires. And this Psalm tugs at our hearts, and says 'boy wouldn't it be wonderful if the world knew Jesus?' Wouldn't it just make you sing if all of Kiama/Minnamurra knew Jesus? If all of the Illawarra knew Jesus? Wouldn't it be the best thing that could happen if your neighbours, your friends, your family, knew Jesus? This Psalm tunes our hearts for Mission. Makes us think of a world that knows him; consider just how wonderful that would be.

Would you pray with me, that God would teach us as we turn to Psalm 96.

Father, open our hearts as we open your word, challenge us,

refresh us, humble us, grow us to know and serve your Son. Amen.

We're going to look at this Psalm in two parts. The first part is the God who deserves the praise of the World. And the second part is the World who wants to praise God. The God who deserves the World's praise and the World who longs to praise God.

Look down with me at verse 1,

Sing to the LORD a new song, sing to the LORD all the earth,
sing to the LORD, praise His name.

Sing, sing, sing. Psalm 96 is a call to worship. An urging to sing, a calling to sing a new song.

Now, new songs. New songs are sung across the Bible. 9 times that phrase, *new song*, appears in the Bible and every time it's in the context of a great salvation. After Israel crossed the Red Sea, Moses and the people sang a new song celebrating God's new deliverance of them from slavery. And in Revelation, the people sing a new song as the Lamb who looks slain, appears to finally fulfill God's plans.

New songs signal that God has done something remarkable, something that has changed everything for those who now sing it. New songs come from mouths attached to minds full of gratitude and wonder that God has done something wonderful for them.

There is much to praise God for. The wonders of his wisdom in creation, the depths of love in redemption. We have much that rightly stirs our hearts to praise.

"I have decided to follow Jesus, I have decided to follow Jesus,
I have decided to follow Jesus, no turning back, no turning back."

I remember singing that song with tears down my face, struck afresh with the wonders of God's mercy and grace to a sinner like me. There is much about our God that gives us reason for song, and there is something about music that can capture and express our response, our gratitude, our awe.

But I wonder if you noticed who is called to sing this new song? It's a bit hard to miss, right there in verse one. "Sing to the LORD, who? all the earth!"

The psalm was written by Israel, but its call extends far beyond it. The psalm isn't summoning just Israel to sing to the Lord, its summoning the whole world. Sing to the LORD all the earth. Verse 7 calls on all families of all nations, and verse 13, draws in all creation to sing, worship, and rejoice in the Lord.

There's a strange dynamic going on here and it'll pay off to listen carefully to it. The Psalm is addressed to the whole world, to all of creation, "sing to the Lord all the earth". But it wasn't sung to them.

What do I mean by that? There is one place in the Bible we know this psalm was sung, one occasion it was sung at. 1 Chronicles 16, when the ark of God was brought by David into Jerusalem and placed in the tabernacle. It's a happy day, King David leads a grand parade, a grand procession, dancing all the way with great joy, as the ark which represented God's presence and God's blessing was brought into this city. And on that day, we're told they sung this Psalm as a thanksgiving. Sing to the Lord, a new song, they said, sing to the Lord all the earth. The only problem was, the whole world wasn't with them at that time, in fact it was a celebration by Israel for Israel, with only Israelites invited.

When Israel sang this song, the nations of the world aren't in the room. Israel sings to Israel, a song addressed to the world. It's a bit weird, right?

But it makes sense as a song sung by people who aren't content to praise God alone. That's not enough. When they look around, at each other, they say this isn't enough. Our praise isn't enough to recognise just how great our God is, just how great his salvation is. I want no empty pew, I want this place jammed full, I want every place jammed full. God deserves the praise of every other nation as well, the praise of the whole world.

It's meant as a gee-up. You know what I mean by that. A hype-up, like infectious enthusiasm, a building of energy together, encouraging each other that this God that we follow, this God shouldn't just get our praise. This God is so impressive, what he has done for us is so good, that he is worthy to be praised by the whole world as well.

O for a thousand tongues to sing. O for every tongue, of every person of every nation, to sing to my God. Because he deserves it. That's this Psalm. It's the imaginations of a congregation gone wild with the wondrous thought of a world praising God.

Where does that longing fit in your hearts? When you look around this room are you discontented? As you think of a world filled with billions of people who don't know the salvation of our Lord Jesus, and hundreds of millions who will go their whole lives without even meeting a Christian, are you discontented?

What is your heart for Kiama/Minnamurra? Your desire for the Illawarra? Your longing for the world? What do you want for your unbelieving children or partners, friends, or neighbours? Doesn't God deserve their praise?

I've had the privilege of leading a few friends to Jesus, nothing special, just praying for them, offering to read the Bible with them and witnessing God's work as he met them in his word. Can I tell you seeing these friends join me in church, join with me in singing with joy about a salvation I know they have found, is just awesome. That has been a moment to really make my heart sing, but can I tell you Psalm 96 challenges me here. Because it tells me that the cause of my joy in that moment, the thing that ought to make my heart sing, is not to be first because of the salvation of one of my friends, because it's not first about them. Rather, it is

first about God. From the mouth of another one he made and loves, God is receiving the praise he deserves.

After all, what is the alternative? From verses 4 and 5, the gods they currently offer their praise to, the ones who receive their offerings of time, talent, and treasure, are nothing but idols. The gods the world trusts are idols, that word literally means *nothings, nonentities, futile things*. They do nothing, have done nothing. Powerless next to the God all-powerful.

Only one God is worthy of praise. Only one God made the heavens. Only one God has splendour and majesty, strength, and honour going before him and around him. The sense is like police cars and secret service in a motorcade. And this God ought to receive the praise of the world. All people ought (from verse 8), ascribe to Him the glory due His name.

How often have you prayed the prayer,

Our father who is in heaven, Hallowed be your name.

It's the same request, the same desire that sits behind the prayer. That desire that the world won't mock God, but honour him, and acknowledge him, as they ought.

Well, how will people be drawn to praise him? With verse 2, comes the call, to proclaim his salvation day after day, declare his glory among the nations. It's like they've said, if we want the whole world to praise our God, then I guess, we'll have to go get them. If God deserves the praise of all the earth, then we can't keep his salvation secret.

How will people be drawn to praise him? Only if we tell them what he has done. God's goodness, his character, is known in what he has done. His glory is known in his acts of salvation, his marvellous deeds. Only by speaking about them can we draw people into the praise of God. Those who sing the song of Psalm 96 long to do it day after day, among all nations, all peoples, So they might draw more and more people into the praise of the God who deserves it. For great is the Lord and most worthy of praise.

Friends, God deserves the praise of the world. And fundamentally that is what motivates us to consider heading off to places like Madagascar, that is what motivates all of us, I hope, send us and send others with great enthusiasm, it's what motivates us to speak to our friends and family about our great God and king. Whether we are meeting the nations or meeting the neighbours, we do it from hearts tuned to discontent that our God is not receiving their praise. God deserves the praise of the world.

That's the first thing this Psalm shows us.

The second thing is that the World actually wants to worship our God.

If you asked any person on the street, what do you want most in life, if you asked your unbelieving family or friends, that question, what do you want more than anything, what do you think they would say?

The Psalm says God is the source of so much that the world wants. There's salvation, rescue in verse 2, there's happiness in verses 11 and 12. In verse 5, there is even fulfillment found in the move from empty, nothing idols to the worship of the God who made the heavens.

But this psalm focuses on two things. Two things, which the world seems to want more than anything at the moment. Stability and justice.

Both of these come in verse 10. Have a look down there, Say among the nations, The Lord reigns. In verse 2 it was God's salvation and glory that was being proclaimed. Here it's God's rule. The Lord Reigns.

That's not just a statement about God being sovereign today. It's a phrase that looks forward, anticipates something coming, something new. It's the news that God's kingdom has come.

Pause

When will it end? We heard that question a lot during the COVID years, we hear it now as we look at conflicts ongoing in Europe, poverty and corruption ongoing across Africa, recently as we hear of natural disaster after natural disaster; Libya, Morocco, even as we think about things more directly affecting us, the chronic increasing cost of living, or the more acute and repeated times of bushfire and flood. When will it end?

The Psalm says that the God who made the heavens, he reigns. Under him the world is firmly established, it's a phrase that is connected in the Bible to the ruling of God over creation. Only he has the power to bring stability. Only with him restraining it, can it never be moved.

The promise of this psalm is that the God who fixes the world on its foundations, who sets order to creation, his rule will bring the stability we long for.

As Avril and I contemplate heading to what locals call the poorest part of the poorest country in the world, a part of the world afflicted by terrible poverty, by corruption, by famine and disease, God is coming to bring it all to an end, here in Australia, there in Madagascar, for all of us, the stability that God promises to bring in fullness, really is wonderful.

But he promises not only stability. God will judge the peoples with equity. God will bring justice and judgement.

So much happens in the world for which we rightly want justice. Before moving into ministry, I studied law and after graduating, I worked for a year with the government, as a paralegal

working on cases coming out of the Royal Commission into Institutional Child Abuse. We were responding to claims made against government schools, prisons, hospitals. There has been no time in my life where I have longed for justice more than my first week in that job. And the justice we sought to give was so weak, so insufficient.

In a world of so much injustice, with governments and court systems only barely capable of ensuring that justice is done. Our world longs for true justice, to be treated fairly.

And God is coming to judge. Look at verses 11 to 13, all creation is getting excited. The heavens are rejoicing, the earth is being glad, the sea is resounding, the fields are being jubilant, the trees are singing for joy. Heavens, earth, sea, fields, everything in all of them; rejoicing, being glad, being jubilant, resounding, singing for joy. The psalm really labours the point, doesn't it? Every word for rejoicing in the thesaurus is being used to describe every aspect of creation. It's a universal, creation-wide, call to joy. All of creation swept up into the joy of what verse 13 announces. Look down there, Let all creation rejoice before the Lord, for he comes, he comes to judge the earth. Creation is beside itself because the Lord is coming, coming to judge.

It's interesting that justice is not the enemy of Joy. Its easy to think of the idea of God's judgement negatively, we want to avoid those passages in the Bible. But this Psalm doesn't have any hesitation in holding joy and justice together. Creation rejoices at God's coming in righteousness and truth to judge. His coming to judge, isn't just a negative idea, of coming to punish people for wrongdoing. Though don't get me wrong, that will happen, people will be held accountable for how they have treated God and others. But God's judgement is far richer than that. Its a judgement that involves restoration. A judging that will be in righteousness. A judging that will be according to gracious promises made to his people, a judgement that vindicates his people and sets right the universe for rejoicing.

By describing God's judgement this way, the Psalm is looking forward to God's judgement of us in Jesus. A judgement that was against us, but now rests in another, a judgement paid in full by Jesus. And so a judgement that sets us free and restores us, brings us to rejoicing, a salvation that brings out in us a new song.

This is the justice that God's kingdom brings, a justice that not only deals with evil we see and hate in the world, but a justice that restores and vindicates God's people and a justice that returns God's world to how he designed it.

That's Psalm 96. A song of Israel. A summons to the world. A summons to tune our hearts to long for the world to sing a new song of salvation and restoration. A new song to the God and King whose reign ensures stability, justice and joy for all creation.

How do we tune our hearts to long to see this song on the lips of our neighbours and the nations?

We first have to contend with busy, don't we? The bills to pay, the kids to raise, the doctors to visit, the holidays to plan, the holidays to pay for, the conflict at home to deal with and drama at work to handle. It's all too easy for us to follow along in that constant stream of things in front of us and forget that there is a great and sovereign God who is doing something with this world, with us.

Friends, let your heart be tuned by this psalm, let it lift your eyes above all these things that distract. We have a God who deserves the praise of the world. Embrace the discontent. The discontent of empty pews. The discontent of tribes and people, groups as yet unreached. Would you long with the psalmist that every nation would sing to the Lord a new song. For great is the Lord and most worthy of praise.

That prayer *Our Father in Heaven, Hallowed be your name*. It's far more challenging than we often admit. But a joyful heart who loves our God and wants to see him magnified, will be oh so willing to pray it, oh so willing to give of ourselves, to give away ourselves, in service of His name being hallowed, Him receiving the praise of the nations.

For Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise.

Would you pray with me?

Father,

You are great and most worthy of praise. Help us to long together for the world to know and acknowledge this, that your great glory, your strength, your splendour, the marvellous works of your salvation would lead our friends, our family, our neighbours, our city, our world to worship you, the one who meets our deepest desires so fully in Your son. And it's in His name that we pray.

Amen.